

Love that Defines Your Identity

The Gospel – The Greatest Love

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Bible Text: Romans 8:31-39

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I'd like to begin this particular message by asking you to reflect on a simple and yet profound question: who are you? Let me repeat that: who are you? I suppose sometimes we can answer that question in different ways, for example, if you'd asked me that question last Saturday at noon when my alma mater, Ohio State, was playing Michigan, I would have responded that I am a Buckeye and I'm right with this dude right here.

Woman: Oh, have you been on a lot of blind dates?

Man: Um, well, this would make one.

Woman: Oh, me too. What do you do?

Man: I'm a vet.

Woman: I love animals.

Man: Really? Where are you from?

Woman: Michigan born and raised. Go Blue.

Man: [man leaving] Go Buckeyes! Go Buckeyes!

I mean, I totally get that commercial. I fully understand that commercial. Sometimes the answer to the question, "Who are you?" is based on the job that we do. For example, someone might say, "Well, I'm an engineer or I'm a pastor or I'm an architect or I'm a teacher. I'm a stay at home mom. I'm a police officer. I'm a doctor. I'm an attorney. I'm an accountant." In other words, sometimes that question of, "Who are you?" is answered by a sporting event, sometimes it's answered by the job we do. Sometimes it's even based on the kind of life situation that we're in at the time. So someone might say, "Well, I'm married. Or I'm single. Or I am a father with children still in my home. Or I am a husband. Or I am a wife. Or I am a mother." Sometimes the answer to that question is based on a current event. In 2001 shortly after 9/11, a series of TV ads ran and it showed a number of people from all walks of life essentially saying one little phrase, "I am an American." And if you remember those commercials, they were calls to unity; they were calls to national pride; they were calls to work together to protect our way of life. And when you hear that phrase, "I am an American," there are certain things that just absolutely resonate in your mind about it. There are certain things about how we think and how we function that are very different than others so it's part of our identity, if you will.

Sometimes in the quietness of our moments when no one else is around, we might have some different answers to the question, "Who are you?" Some might say things like, "Well, I'm good for nothing or I am worthless. Or I am needy. Or I am a failure." While others will take the other side of the equation, the other extreme and say, "Well, I'm wonderful or I'm completely self-sufficient." Regardless of its variety, one thing is for certain: how you answer that question will impact how you live. You see, each answer to the question that I gave was a look into our identity. It was a look at what defines us, what is important to us and even the grid through which we make decisions. Well, this morning we're going to investigate together what our first answer to the identity question should be. When we first think of the question, "Who are you?" what is the first thing that should come to our minds?

With that, I would like to invite you to turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 8. That is on page 124 of the back section of the Bible that's in the chair in front of you. Romans 8, page 124.

This morning we're continuing our Christmas series that was entitled "The Gospel - The Greatest Love Story Ever Told." Last week Pastor Viars explained that we wanted to finish off our year studying the good news of Jesus Christ and that good news he began with a series by helping us think about, first of all, love in spite of our sin. And Scripture explained that God did not wait until we were wonderful to love us. Good thing, huh? Instead, what he did was he loved us while we were still sinners; while we were ungodly; while we were still enemies. I hope that that served as a source of encouragement for you this week. I hope, in fact, you never get tired of hearing truths like that from the word of God in order to encourage you to have hope and to be thankful. Well, today we're going to take the next step in this particular series and think about the issue that love that defines your identity. Love that identifies your identity. We're going to turn in the Gospel just a little bit. We've looked at it from this perspective last week of loving in spite of our sin and now we're going to look at it in terms of how it defines our identity and I'd like to begin by reading the text. Romans 8, beginning in verse 31.

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "For your sake we are being put to death all day long, we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now, I hope that's the response. Praise God for that piece of truth and let's begin to unpack some of it right here from the beginning. Verse 31 says, "What shall we say to these things?" And we need to first think about, "Well, what are the things that we're supposed to speak to?" And I think while there are some questions about how far back Paul is referring, I'd like to suggest to you that this is actually going all the way back to the portion of Scripture that Pastor Viars explained last week, that is Romans 5, beginning in verse 1 where the point goes something like this: if the love of God worked while we were sinners, the point of chapter 5, verses 1 to 11; if the finished work of Christ overcame death and the law so that now grace and life are possible, Romans 5:12 to 21; if grace really frees you from the power and penalty of sin, the subject of Romans 6:1 to 23; if you have been freed from the law, Romans 7:1 to 25; if the Spirit is in you, if you have life in the Spirit and if the Spirit intercedes on your behalf, Romans 8:1 to 27; and if God really does work all things for your good and for his glory so that we are brought into full conformity of Christ, Romans 8:28 to 30; then I should have hope. I should be encouraged. I should be excited. What shall we say to these things? What we say is, "Praise God," is what we say. "I should be thankful that the Lord has won the battle over all of my greatest threats. The Lord has rescued me and saved me."

And so for all of you who would say you have put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ for your salvation, then you get to praise God. You get to hear these words and say, "Thank you, Lord." You get to be encouraged, be full of hope. But if you're here this morning and you would say, "Well, I've been around for a little while and I've heard this before but I'm not sure I've ever made that decision," then I want to encourage you in the quietness of even this room to repent of your sin, to call it what it is, it's an offense against God. To see the picture of the cross as your only means of salvation and to believe in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and the promises that I just talked about can be yours in Christ. Now, for those of us who have done that already, this gives us the first answer to the question, "Who are you?" I am a Christian. I am a Christian, saved by the grace of God and given an overwhelming abundance of spiritual blessings. That's who I am. So before I am anything else, I am a Christian. So before I am a Buckeye, before I am a father, before I am a husband, before I am an American, I am a Christian saved by the grace of God.

And it's from that starting point that Paul begins to add to that identity, to begin to explain it a little more clearly and I'd like to suggest three statements about our identity from Romans 8:31 to 39 that give us hope and encourage us to love the Lord and motivate us to make godly decisions. Here's the first one: identity statement number 1 is: I need nothing. I need nothing. Verses 31 and 32 and let me see if I can demonstrate this from the text. Here's how it begins, "What shall we say to these things?" And we said what we should say is praise God, thank you for all that you have done for me. Then if God is for us, the text goes on, well, who is against us? "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" You see, these two verses provide two very short but two very encouraging statements.

Here's the first one: because God is for us, there is no overcoming force against us. By using the conditional statement, "if God is for us then who is against us," he is not saying that there is a question as to whether God is for us nor is he saying that the believer has no enemies. You see, in fact, the Apostle Paul actually writes about his enemies on numerous occasions. He describes individuals in some cases by name who oppose the Gospel, who oppose Jesus Christ, who oppose Christians or who oppose him personally. Paul was not trying to candy coat the Christian life. Instead, what Paul is saying here is that while there may be individuals, while there may be people in authority, while there may even be governments that are opposed to Christians, none of them have overcoming power. No matter what kind of pressure they exert; no matter the intensity of their hatred; no matter what intents they make to distract, the reality is that God is for us and that is never, ever, ever compromised. Praise God for that, huh?

The text goes on then, not simply to state that point but then to describe how it is that God is for us. In other words, what is the picture of God being for us and the text made it clear: because God did not spare his Son, he will give us all the other promises that he made too. In other words, here is how we know that God is for us, first of all, he gave us his Son. And as Pastor Viars mentioned last week, there is a sense in which every Christmas message is also an Easter message. Paul Shrimp recently wrote a little post about being thankful for the tree and he was not talking about the Christmas trees that are nicely decorated in our living rooms, instead he was talking about the tree that represents the cross that Jesus died on, a picture that Christmas ultimately does point ahead to Easter and the reality of the cross of Jesus Christ. That's why God gave us his Son. In words that could not be any stronger, Philippians 2:6 to 8 describes it this way, "Who, although He existed in the form of God," speaking about Jesus Christ, "did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped," held onto, "but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

You see, what God gave his Son for was not simply to be the ruler of the earth, he gave him to be a sufferer and even the Christmas message does not have a lot of fanfare. It's actually quite lowly, quite unexciting, really. Outside of a few moments of angels singing and men appearing at the birth of Jesus Christ, it rather is unnotable. In fact, so unnotable that he must be born in a stable. The argument of Romans 8 is that God gave us his Son to die for us and therefore if he was willing to do that, then surely he will give us all the things that he just described were his promises. So things like if God freed us from the law, if God freed us from the power of sin, if God freed us from the power of death, if he gives us grace that always rises above our sin, if he gave us his Spirit as an intercessor, if he gave us his Spirit as a future guarantee of glory and ensured that everything ultimately works for our good, then here was the question that Paul is begging us to answer: what else do you need? What else do you need? If God gave us already the hard part, if you will, that is his Son, then surely he will give us the easy part that is all the other promises that he made and at the end of that can we really say: Lord, thank you for what you have done but frankly it's just not enough.

You see, my Christian identity says that I need nothing. It says I need nothing. I have been given everything that I need. I have been given his Son and I have been given the promises that he made in accordance with his Son. What a tremendous promise and think about the practical implications of such a series of promises. When I return home from a day at the office, I don't need my wife to give anything to me. I don't need my children to serve me. I don't need my wife to serve me. I don't need to sit and relax. In fact, I don't need anything. Jesus has provided all the resources that I need and if we want to use the little love tank analogy just for a second here, here's to buy into it for a minute: when my love tank is full with the love that comes from the love of God, then it's a love that satisfies. It's a love that protects. It's a love that secures. It's a love that comforts. And that allows us to serve as Christian husbands or Christian wives or Christians in our various relationships by loving according to the love which we have already been given. You see, the statement of identity not only encourages me but it gives me hope and it also impacts how I even get to function because if I don't need anything, then one of the questions that I get to ask as a parent of children is: when I get home, am I ready for homework? Now, can I just tell you something? I've already done chemistry. I've already done math. I've done a lot of math. I've already studied more English than I care to study in my life but sometimes when I get home, guess what I have? I have chemistry homework. I have math homework. I have English homework. And do you know what? In the love that God has given, I can be fully prepared to do another set of chemistry homework or another set of math homework or another set of English homework because I don't need anything. Can I have a discussion? Yes. Am I ready for a series of questions? I should be. Maybe even a confrontation. I'd better be because I have been given everything I need already.

Now, let's consider for a minute: what happens if I don't think like that? Let's put the shoe on the other foot for just a minute and let's just say that that's not how I'm going to function. That's not how I'm going to think. And so what I'm going to do is I'm going to say that what the Lord has provided is not enough. He hasn't given me all the resources that I really need. I'd like to suggest to you that when you get to that point, you decide that there's somebody else who needs to give you something that you do not have and so you need to demand it. You need to in some way get it because there is some other thing or some other person that is actually going to bring about the happiness that you desire. And you know, as I have observed in my own life as well in the lives of others, is that the kind of love that we demand from others isn't a satisfying love. It's the kind of love that just demands more and more and more and more. It's like the thing that tells you you'll be happy if you just have me except it really lies to you and what it says is, "Well, this is the amount that you need today but tomorrow you actually need more and the next day, you actually need more than that." That's why these verses are so important because they teach me that I have everything I need already. It's freeing. I don't have to demand. I don't have to manipulate. I don't have to clamor for what I "think I need," because after all, I don't need anything that Jesus has not already given me and neither do you.

Now, that's an application in the home. Think about application in serving. You know, today the Christmas For Everyone bags are due. Did you realize that? All our green bags are due today so if you forgot yours, make sure you bring it this evening at church family night because we need to get all those in. Well, if you're like me, you want to participate

for lots of reasons. It's good for you to buy for somebody that you don't know. It's good for your testimony in the community that you actually care about people who aren't your own kin and it's good if you have children for them to recognize you're buying for other people too. So there may be lots of reasons why you decided to get involved and don't confess, just leave that to me for now: have you ever wondered whether those kids' parents, if you just gave them the money, would have gotten up early or stayed out late in order to get the best deals? Where they were looking through the Thanksgiving day ads to find out, "What can I get that this child is asking for for like a dollar at 2 o'clock in the morning because I'm going to be there? Because then I get to buy like 35 things instead of just one." Then you're asking yourself, "I wonder if the parents would have done that?" Surely some of them have but, you know, when we go down those roads, we start thinking, "Boy, I need some level of acknowledgment, don't I? I need some level of acknowledgment for all the work that I put into this. I want a nice pat on the back at least from somebody to say, wow, thank you very much. Well, you're welcome. Thanks for telling me." Well, what my identity is supposed to tell me is that I don't need anything.

Or here comes Living Nativity and Living Nativity, we're about ready to start. Are you excited? Friday night, here we go. We're beginning Living Nativity. You know, sometimes when you're out there and you're thinking, "You know, somebody needs to pat me on the back for doing this because this is crazy." Some of you have been there, right? You know and sometimes it's really nice and easy, it's like 40 degrees out there and it's nice and easy. Then there are other times where you're thinking, "Oh my goodness, I don't know that I'm going to live to the end of Living Nativity. What I need is someone to bring me a nice cup of hot chocolate or coffee and I need a pat on the back, a thank you for serving so much." Well again, my identity is supposed to tell me that I really don't need that acknowledgment. I don't need to have that because I have everything I need in Christ already.

Some of you have already decided and thank you for doing this, to house someone for the biblical counseling training conference coming up in February. It's a whole week long and so therefore we have people coming from all over the country, in fact, from all over the world and there are a lot of people who ask for housing. They just ask for a bed so that they can have a warm place to sleep, a comfortable bed and that helps offset the cost that it takes to come here. And so at this point, we are already in the place where several have been housed but we need 40 beds. We need 40 beds today. There are about 70 people who are waiting for an answer to, "Do I have a bed right now?" today. And so the best Christmas gift they can get right now is an answer, "Yes, we have a bed and here's who you're going to be staying with." And if you'd be willing to do that, there are some forms out at the welcome center that you can sign up for and if you do that today, that would help us a ton. But then here's the other piece of that: we can't be asking all of them to acknowledge how wonderful we are for doing that. We do it because we don't need anything, because Jesus has provided us everything that we need. It allows us to say that we serve because God has given us his Son and provided a plethora of spiritual blessings both now and in the future and I simply don't need anything else. You see, that helps me have hope. It encourages me and it motivates me in my decision-making.

Here's a second identity statement, number 2: Jesus' opinion is the only one that matters. Jesus' opinion is the only one that matters. Notice how the text puts it, verse 33. "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." Now, many of you remember that old EF Hutton commercials. I don't know if they're still in business today but their tagline, their punchline was "When EF Hutton speaks, everyone listens." It was trying to distinguish their voice from everyone else's. Well, you know, there are a lot of people who like to talk and sometimes they don't say very nice things and in these verses, Paul explains that there are some questions that are a whole lot more meaningful than other questions and not only that but there are some opinions that count a whole lot more than other opinions. You see, the first question that Paul raises is, "Who will be able to make accusation against us?" This is not exactly a rhetorical question because there is actually at least three different accusers in our lives. We think of the accuser, Satan, who is more than happy to describe, "Hey, have you checked out, have you noticed that Job only loves you because you bless him?" Now, God had already offered Job up as an example, right? But Satan then comes back with, "Yeah, but he only does that because you give him everything he wants. Take it away and he'll curse you." That's the kind of attitude that Satan has toward those who put their faith in Christ. Then there are those who hate us, maybe hate us as a group or hate us individually. Then the most serious of all is that our own sin stands as an accuser against us and yet here is part of the glory of the passage, that all those who have put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ are destined for glory and thus those accusers are unable to bring a successful charge. You see, whoever wishes to stand and whatever evidence they bring, will never outweigh the evidence of the cross of Jesus Christ or his righteousness. No accusation, regardless of source, can possibly be effective.

Then verse 34 makes that exact same point except even stronger now, "Who will be able to condemn?" And the answer is, "Well, no one and why is that?" Why can't condemnation happen through us, our own sin or through someone else? And he explains it: because of who Jesus Christ is, the one who died, the one who was raised, the one who was at the right hand of the God, the one who intercedes for us. You see, Christ is the only one who did what was required in order to answer those questions. Who can answer the question of who gets to justify or who can condemn? There is only one person who has the right to answer those questions and that's Jesus based on what he did, based on the position that he holds, based on the compassion that he has. You see, our vindication from the accusers does not come on the basis of their faulty arguments or their false accusations. My sin can stand for itself and the reality is that if it stood all alone, then I would be guilty as charged but this is where verse 34 and more importantly Jesus Christ comes in because Jesus steps forward and he says, "I'm the one who died. I'm the one who was raised. I'm the one who satisfied the wrath of God. I'm the one that made a provision for salvation. I'm the one who is seated at the right hand of God and when I get to speak, everybody else gets to shut it." That's right, everybody else gets to shut it and listen. You see, when Jesus speaks on a matter, nobody else gets to talk because nobody else can bring their blood to the table. Nobody else can bring their authority to the table.

And nobody else can demonstrate the kind of compassion that Jesus demonstrates. Their voice doesn't count because it is not qualified to count.

Now, think about the implications of that, huh? If Jesus' opinion is the one that really matters, its implications are incredible because there will always be people who will put you down. There will be people who make you feel worthless. But in the end, they get to be quiet and the one who condemns and the one who justifies gets to speak. And thankfully that when he does, he's also the one who cares for us and has given us this new identity. You know friends, it would be nice if our spouse or our close friends or our children or our parents would never say a mean thing but that's not reality, is it? So we're going to have to expect at least some grief, at least some disappointment, at least some frustration in our close relationships but when those moments come, here's what you get to tell yourself: Jesus' opinion is the one that really counts. Jesus' word is the one that counts and there's going to be a time when this person who at this moment is harming me and hurtful with their words gets to stop talking and listen as Jesus gets to speak.

Now, this is as good a place as any I think to emphasize that the questions that Paul asked do not imply that there aren't any persons who are against us for surely there are. He doesn't imply that there are no accusers either for there are some of those too. His point throughout this entire section is that none of them are successful. I'm encouraging you to memorize and I am encouraging you to memorize them: I need nothing, Jesus' opinion is the one that matters because I want to encourage you that I need nothing is not a statement saying that you will never need to go to sleep; you will never need to eat dinner; you will never need to pay your bills or play with your children. It is intended to help you focus on the reality that Jesus provides all things sufficient for life. You need rest that comes to your soul, that comes from your relationship with Christ. You need the nourishment that comes from the word of God even more than you need the nourishment that comes from food. You see, saying I need nothing is a recognition just like Paul had made that the priority belongs to the Lord and I really don't have to have anything other than what he has given me.

Jesus' opinion is the only one that matters. Again, it's not an absolute statement because surely what your wife thinks of the kitchen is important. What your boss thinks about your job performance is important. But it's intended to help us focus on the reality that the most important questions in life, who can justify and who can condemn, are only answered by Jesus, the one who died for you and the one who is interceding for you. You see friends, it is because of that that we have hope. It's because of that that we can be encouraged to love the Lord and to be motivated to make godly decisions.

Now, that brings us to the third identity statement. Beginning in verse 35, you see, the statement is: I am secure. And I'm serious about encouraging you to memorize these things: I need nothing, Jesus' opinion is the only one that matters and I am secure. I encourage you to memorize those and use those in the daily moments of your life. Here's why we can say, "I am secure." The text that I read, and it started off this way, "Well, who will separate us from the love of Christ?" Then it goes on to, "Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written,

'For your sake we are being put to death all day long, we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Now, this is one of the strongest passages, if not the strongest passage in the Bible describing security. Paul's quotations do not mince a lot of words. He has known firsthand just how difficult life as a Christian can be. Paul's life, himself as a Christian, came with a death sentence and he's writing to Christians who may be facing similar pressure but he doesn't want that pressure to be overwhelming or in any way debilitating. Instead, he wants to make it clear that in spite of pressure, one's relationship with Christ can never be compromised. And how he does this, he goes to rather significant lengths. He says first of all, there is not a "who" that can separate us. There is not a "who" that can separate us. That's good news because the first question that we're asking is, "Well, is there anybody who possibly could get in the way between me and Christ?" And the answer is absolutely not.

Now, let's think about some of the ways in which that can be threatened or at least we can think it is threatened. You know, take for example, a wife who is in a relationship with a husband that frankly is kind of a bully. He exercises control over her in many ways and he doesn't do that in other relationships because quite frankly, he couldn't get away with it. His boss wouldn't tolerate that. His other friends wouldn't tolerate that. They would just say, "Okay, well, we're done. If that's the way you want to be, then we're done." But in the home where she can't get away, that's exactly what he does and her husband whether he claims to be a Christian or not, is unable to weaken the bonds of God's love through Christ. No matter how many times he puts her down, no matter how many times he just makes life hard by doing things that create chaos, no matter what he does, she can still rest that there is security in her relationship with Christ.

Well, let's put the shoe on the other foot. Let's say it's the husband who in this case has a wife who by definition is the contentious woman of Proverbs. You remember what Proverbs 21 says? It says if she continues to be contentious, then he like takes his mat and he goes up on the roof and he lives there and if he can still hear, ten verses later, he takes his mat and he goes and lives in the wilderness. It's like, "Look, okay. You know, it's time to stop talking. Stop being so contentious." But you know, he's kind of frustrated by that. She's really challenging to him, driving him crazy but even she cannot compromise the love of God between him and Christ. Even if it seems like there isn't very much security in that human relationship, nevertheless there is security in both of their cases' relationship with Christ. You see, there is not a boss, there is not a friend, there is not an enemy, there is not a coworker, there is not a parent, there is not a child, there is not a teacher and there is no one else for that matter that can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ.

Then he adds, there's not a "what" either. So the second question isn't a series of "who's," it's now a series of "what's". So who can separate us and the answer is no one. Well, what about these things? And he describes tribulation and distress and persecution and famine and nakedness, peril or sword. It's interesting to me, you can take a look at it later today if you want, that this list that Paul describes is very much similar to the list of Paul's sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11:23 to 29. As Paul reflects on his own life, what he says is, "Hey, none of these things and I've experienced them. Tribulation can't do it. Distress can't do it. Persecution can't do it. Famine can do it. Nakedness can't do it. Peril can't do it. Sword cannot do it. In fact, none of it can do it because there is nothing. There is not a 'what' that can ever separate a person from the love of God in Christ." Praise God for that. Praise the Lord that that would actually be true. In fact what he says as he says, "Not only do those things not do it but we're, in fact, more than conquerors." Verse 37 describes the fact that we're not just simply one who is beaten and battered but we're the one who has conquered through the finished work of Jesus Christ. Then he describes a series of contrasts in order to see just how secure our relationship with him really is. He says, there are two states of existence, life and death and you know what? That doesn't do it either. There is no life or death. That equation does not separate a person from the love of God in Christ. There is no spiritual power, whether angels or principalities or powers. It's fascinating that he would bring up angels, huh? Would you think the angels would be separating us? But maybe what Paul is getting at here is that maybe Paul has in mind that believers, even some believers, are often more enamored with the sensational than they are with the consistent allegiance and devotion to Christ. So even that, even temporary movement away to the sensational or to something that seems exciting doesn't do it.

Then he describes our temporal condition, things present. There is not anything now that can do it and there is not anything that's yet to come that can do it. Or our spatial locations, things above or things below. In other words, there is not something that is somewhere hidden that we just don't have access to that that would do it. Then this last point I think is for all of us who are kind of skeptical readers, you know, when we read the text we say, "Well, wait a minute, Paul, you didn't talk about this. You missed a spot here. You know, there's a loophole right over here and maybe that's it." What he says is: there's not any created thing. And the last time I read the Bible, there is only one thing that is not created and that is God himself, the one who justifies and the one who condemns. You see, the practical implications are significant yet again. We long for security. We long for security in our jobs. We long for security in our marriages. We long for security in our homes. Our kids want to know for example that their parents are going to stay together. We want, in fact, security in all our human relationships. And yet sometimes they don't feel very secure. In one heated argument, a person can say something that threatens security. They can do something that threatens security. But in our relationship with Christ, it is complete security because he is our Rock, he is our Fortress, he is our Salvation, he is our strong Deliverer and so that helps you respond with love and with grace and with service even in the midst of instability because you know that in your relationship with Christ, things are secure. Your feet are firmly planted and so while you may waver under the pressure of some human relationship, the reality is your feet remain secure. Why? Because Jesus died for you. Because he has given you a new identity. And he's providing ongoing resources for life.

You'll find that when you recognize the Lord's satisfying, comforting and protecting love, you'll have peace and joy that comes from knowing the Lord and so this Christmas season, let's love our neighbors. Let's serve our neighbors. Let's give to our neighbors. Because frankly, we don't need anything. Jesus' opinion is the only one that really matters and we are secure.

Let's stand together for prayer.

Father, thank you for this text, this glorious passage, and thank you for this Christmas time. Thank you for the opportunity to reflect on our identity. And Lord, I pray that as we reflect on the question of, "Who are you?" our first answer is, "I am a Christian." And for those who don't yet know Christ as their Lord and Savior, I pray that you would work in their hearts even now, help them see their sin and help them respond to their sin with repentance and a desire to trust in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And Lord, for all of us I pray that you would help us to remember the fact that you have given us everything we need so that's why we don't need anything else. Help us to remember that Jesus is the one who died for us and who is at the right hand of the Father and who intercedes for us and so therefore, his opinion is the one that counts. And help us to remember, Lord, that there isn't a "who" and there's not a "what" nor is there any created thing that can ever separate us so we are secure. I pray that that would help us be motivated to love you. I pray that it would help us to be motivated to live for you. And I pray, Lord, that as we go about the Christmas ministries this coming week, that we would serve with joy and gladness, reflecting on our wonderful identity that you have given us. In Jesus' name. Amen.